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RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 7348

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 006058

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/MLS
PACOM FOR FPA HUSO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM MARR TH

SUBJECT: THAILAND: OCTOBER 3 SITUATION UPDATE

REF: BANGKOK 5949

Classified By: Charge Alexander A. Arvizu. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

¶1. Summary. Thai troops are no longer visible at checkpoints and government buildings in Bangkok and armored vehicles are off the roads. Thai soldiers remain at some TV stations but are reportedly leaving soon. Thai Rak Thai Party leaders announced that former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had resigned from the party in order to "solve the chaos in the country." MFA sources report that former Thai Ambassador to Washington and lead FTA negotiator Nitya Pibulsonggram will be named Foreign Minister. Other sources suggest that former Thaksin Education Minister and Privy Councilor Kasem Watthanachai will be named Education Minister and Privy Councilor Palakorn Suwannarat will be named Interior Minister. The annual military reshuffle has been announced. Our poll of defense attaches suggests that no other country is imposing military sanctions on the Thai for the coup. End Summary.

TROOPS ARE OFF THE STREETS IN BANGKOK AND LESS VISIBLE IN TV STUDIOS

¶2. (C) Armed troops are no longer present at non-military government installations in Bangkok. Military checkpoints which had been set up at key intersections have been removed. Armored vehicles, which had become tourist sites in recent days, have returned to their bases. In the days after the coup, we witnessed uniformed soldiers in or next to TV broadcast booths at all of the Thai networks. As of today, no military vehicles were present at Channel 3, but some soldiers were seen in the parking lot out of uniform. No soldiers were seen in the control or news room. At ITV, we saw no military vehicles and our confidential sources report no soldiers in the news facility. However soldiers remain at the security guard post on the ITV compound. Armed military remain at Channel 11, but are no longer sitting outside the control booth. Some contacts at the Thai networks report that they have been told that all soldiers will be removed from their facilities in the coming days.

THAKSIN RESIGNS FROM THAI RAK THAI

¶3. (U) Thai Rak Thai (TRT) political party deputy Pongthep

Thepkarnchana announced that former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had resigned from the Party "to solve the chaos in the country." TRT plans to give a press briefing to explain the decision.

NITYA AS FOREIGN MINISTER, KASEM TO EDUCATION AND PALAKORN TO INTERIOR

¶4. (SBU) MFA sources report that former Thai Ambassador to Washington Nitya Pibulsonggram will be named as Foreign Minister in the Surayud government. Nitya, a career diplomat, was formerly Ambassador to Washington and Thailand's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Married to an American and educated at Dartmouth and Brown, Nitya was most recently chief Thai negotiator during Thai-U.S. FTA discussions.

¶5. (SBU) We also hear that Privy Councillor Kasem Watthanachai will be named Education Minister. Kasem is a medical doctor, graduate of the University of Chicago and former Rector of Chiang Mai University. He ran for Parliament in 2001 as a member of former Prime Minister Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party and served as Education Minister under Thaksin.

¶6. (SBU) Privy Councillor Palakorn Suwannarat is rumored to be named Interior Minister. Palakorn has a Master's Degree from Ohio University and is a former Governor of Pattani and Chiang Mai. He is also a former Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Interior Ministry.

MILITARY SANCTIONS BY OTHERS

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¶7. (C) Our contacts with other Embassies in Bangkok leads us to believe that no other country is imposing military sanctions on the Thai yet:

--The UK DATT said that working level educational exchanges continue and that there is no move afoot to cancel mil-mil CT courses. He did confirm that, shortly after the coup due to the uncertain situation, the Royal Navy had canceled a planned ship visit scheduled to take place this week. They have no planned future ship visit until next spring.

--The Australian DATT reports his country has no mandatory sanctions to impose after a coup. He has received no indication from Canberra that any military assistance will be cut and is proceeding with ongoing programs.

--Canada has a small English language program for military officials. Our source at the Canadian Embassy said that Ottawa is considering cutting a long-term English training course but added no final decision has been made.

--France has no significant mil-mil training program but occasionally sends a ship to visit Thailand.

--Japan has no mil-mil programs to Thailand but participates in Cobra Gold.

--Singapore has no plan to cut mil-mil cooperation.

MILITARY OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHERS

¶8. (C) Our contacts in the Attaché and diplomatic world confirm that some countries look at our sanctions and a possible increase in the Thai defense budget as an opportunity:

--Chinese diplomats and military officers are rumored to want to increase the slots for Thai military students taking part in their military education program.

--Russian attaches appear eager to renew their campaign to

have the Thai select the SU-30 over the F-16 in any new fighter aircraft purchase made by the Royal Thai Air Force.

--Israeli contractors are working with the Russians on the SU-30 program and have an office up and running in Bangkok.

MILITARY RESHUFFLE

¶19. (C) Every October, the Thai military announces a major reshuffle shifting officers into new positions throughout the military. DAO is providing detailed analysis septel of the recently announced reshuffle. A number of our key interlocutors have moved. Among these are former National Security Council Secretary-General and U.S. Command and General Staff College (USCGSC) Graduate GEN Winai Phatthayikun who was named Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defense (he will continue to serve on the Council for National Security).

¶10. (C) At Royal Thai Army (RTA) Headquarters, GEN Sonthi Boonyaratglin remains CINC as expected. The new deputy CINC is GEN Paisarn Katanyoo. We had worked closely in previous Cobra Gold exercises and in administering tsunami relief with former 3rd Army Corps Commander LTG Saprang Kalayanaramit. Saprang, a vocal critic of the Thaksin administration, was promoted to full General and named Assistant RTA CINC together with newly promoted GEN Anupong Poajinda, a Thaksin prep school classmate who supported the coup. The new RTA Chief of Staff is GEN Montri Sankhasap, a UK Command and General Staff College graduate.

¶11. (C) At Royal Thai Supreme Command (RTSC), West Point graduate (class of '71) GEN Boonsrang Niampradith was named Supreme Commander as expected. Boonsrang is also replacing former RTSC commander GEN Ruengroj Mahasaranond on the Council for National Security (CNS). RTSC Deputy Commander is Sandhurst graduate GEN Phairot Phanitsamai.

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¶12. (C) Former RTSC Chief of Staff and USCGSC graduate GEN Lertrat Ratanawanich was shunted off to an inspector general position presumably for having been too close to Thaksin. Lertrat also has a reputation for having business practices that are excessive even by Thai Army standards. Former RTSC J-3 LTG Khemerat Kanchanawat was named chief of staff of officers attached to the Supreme Commander (not to be confused with the more prestigious position of Chief of Staff). Former Cobra Gold chief and deputy commander to the EU-ASEAN mission to Aceh, LTG Niphat Thonglek, remains responsible for the Military Border Affairs Department.

NEW CNS

¶13. (U) The RTG announced the expansion of the CNS to include two new members -- the previously mentioned Assistant RTA CINCs GEN Anupong and GEN Saprang. Together with RTSC Commander GEN Boonsrang who replaces Ruengroj, these three officers will join the other five members of the CNS already in place: RTA CINC General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, RTAF CINC Air Chief Marshal Chalit Pookphasuk, RTN CINC Admiral Satirapan Keyanon, Police General Kovit Wattana and, General Winai Phattiyakul.

MORE SCHOOL BURNINGS

¶14. (C) Two schools burned down separately in the northeastern cities of Buriram and Nakhon Ratchasima overnight on October 1 and October 2, respectively. No one was hurt in the fires, but they follow the five school burnings in Khamphengphet (Reftel) last week. Although the causes of all the fires remain undetermined, some Thai are speculating that they may be related to people's sentiments against the coup in that region. The northeast is traditionally a TRT Party stronghold.

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